

Message Text

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11

ACTION ARA-20

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R 222049Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6631

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

CONFIDENTIAL TEGUCIGALPA 1233

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, HO

SUBJECT: TRANSPORTATION STRIKE

BEGIN SUMMARY: A STRIKE OF BUS AND TAXI OWNERS HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 22 BUT WAS POSTPONED FOR FIVE DAYS AFTER A JOINT COMMISSION OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND OWNERS MET TO DISCUSS SITUATION. THE LABOR MOVEMENT HAS CONDEMNED THE STRIKE THREAT AS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AND AIMED AT OVERTHROWING THE MILITARY REGIME. THE STRIKE IS CONCERNED WITH ECONOMIC MATTERS BUT HAS ACQUIRED POLITICAL OVERTONES WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME. IT APPEARS THAT OPPOSITION ELEMENTS ARE USING THE STRIKE AS MEANS OF SHOWING GOVERNMENT INEPIITUDE IN THE FACE OF A DEGENERATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

1. A MEETING OF BUS AND TAXI OWNERS TOOK PLACE IN THE TOWN SIGUATEPEQUE ON MARCH 10. AT THAT TIME A SO-CALLED "CONSOLIDATED FEFENSE COMMITTEE FOR LAND TRANSPORT" WAS ESTABLISHED TO COORDINATE THE ACTION OF THE OWNERS IN THEIR PROTESTS AGAINST THE RISING COST OF GASOLINE, THE EXORBITANT COST OF REPLACEMENT PARTS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION

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OF A PROPOSED GOVERNMENT LAW TO REGULATE THEIR ACTIVITIES.

THE PROPOSED DECREE IS CALLED THE "BOTTAZZI LAW" AFTER THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF TRANSPORT, ANGELO BOTTAZZI SUAREZ. THE COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED A PERIOD OF TEN DAYS FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE ACTION OR THEY WOULD GO ON STRIKE.

2. THE GOVERNMENT REACTED BY FORMING A JOINT COMMISSION OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS OF THE DEFENSE COMMITTEE WHICH MET ON MARCH 19 TO CONSIDER THE MATTERS RAISED BY THE OWNERS. THE COMMISSION WAS SUCCESSFUL IN HAVING THE STRIKE POSTPONED FOR FIVE DAYS. THE JOINT COMMISSION ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD UTILIZE THE PERIOD TO ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM.

3. THE DEMANDS OF THE BUS AND TAXI OWNERS HAVE BEEN MET WITH CRITICISM BY LABOR UNION LEADERS. ANDRES VICTOR ARTILES, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CONFEDERATION OF HONDURAN WORKERS (CTH), TOLD EMPLOYERS THAT THE REAL REASON FOR STRIKE WAS DESIRE OF OWNERS TO AVOID IMPLEMENTATION OF BOTTAZZI LAW BECAUSE IT WOULD COMPEL THEM TO ESTABLISH ITINERARIES, BUILD TERMINALS, AVOID OVERLOADING AND IN GENERAL GIVE THE PASSENGERS RELIABLE SERVICE. HE POINTED OUT THAT OWNERS WERE FIERCELY OPPOSED TO PROPOSED LAW BECAUSE IT WOULD LIMIT THEIR PROFITS. ARTILES STATED PUBLICLY THAT THE CTH DID NOT SUPPORT THE STRIKE AND QUESTIONED ITS MOTIVES. CELEO GONZALEZ, PRESIDENT OF THE NORTH COAS LABOR FEDERATION FESITRANH, CALLED A MEETING OF THE FEDERATION'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON MARCH 20. THE COMMITTEE CALLED THE STRIKE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AND SAID THAT ITS PURPOSE IS TO OVERTHROW THE REGIME. THE COMMITTEE PASSED A RESOLUTION THAT: (A) PLACED THE UNION MOVEMENT ON ALERT; (B) FULLY SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT; (C) CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPLEMENT THE BOTTAZZI LAW; (D) ASKED THAT DRASTIC MEASURES BE TAKEN AGAINST THE SUBVERSIVE ACTION OF BUS OWNERS AND (E) CONDEMNED THE PROPOSED STRIKE. RUBEN SOLANO DIAZ, A LEADER OF THE STRIKE, PUBLICLY STATED THAT GONZALEZ AND ARTILES DID NOT KNOW WHAT THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT AND SHOULD SHUT UP.

4. COMMENT: THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE TRANSPORT STRIKE HAS TAKEN ON POLITICAL OVERTONES. THE OPPOSITION TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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REGIME IS USING IT AS A MEANS OF SHOWING THAT THINGS ARE GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE. CLEARLY THIS STRATEGY IS AIMED AT CREATING AN IMAGE OF GOVERNMENT INEPTITUDE IN THE FACE OF A DEGENERATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION. IN THAT REGARD, THERE IS EVIDENCE OF INCREASING PREOCCUPATION BEING VOICED BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT CONCERNING VARIOUS GOVERNMENT ACTIONS. IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE STRIKE THREAT IS BEING MANIPULATED IN AN ATTEMPT

TO INFLUENCE THOSE OFFICERS WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT
GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENTS. THE DEFENSIVE STANCE OF GONZALEZ
AND ARTILES SHOWS THAT THE LABOR MOVEMENT IS CONCERNED
ABOUT THE POLITICAL COLORATION OF THE STRIKE AND ARE
GIVING NOTICE OF THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN
THE FACE OF THIS CHALLENGE FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR.
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